

## **I'll Be Home for Christmas**

Message #3 in the series "I'll Be Home for Christmas"

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
December 19, 2021

As we prepare for God's word, would you join with me as we go before the Lord in prayer?

*Lord God, open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this, we pray Lord, in Jesus' name. All God's people said, Amen.*

Well, thank you again for joining us in worship today. The word of God is really a potent gift to us, especially this time of year as we prepare our hearts for Christmas. I think God has placed on my heart a very important question. And that question specifically is this, "What have you inherited from your parents?". Now we know biology tells us that we can inherit our eye color, the color of our hairs and all that kind of stuff from our biology, from the DNA, from the genes of our parents. But there is research that has been passed on to us that tells us we inherit a few other things like, do you know that you can inherit from your parents, your ability to roll your tongue? And I know that some of you right now are trying it. Right? So, rolling your tongue, dimples, you inherit from your parents, your dimples or lack thereof. You also inherit from your parents, whether you're right or left-handed. Right? And those who are left-handed are the only ones in their right mind. Correct. Think about it. For those of you who are into biology, you know what I'm talking about.

So, you also inherit from your parents, your hairline, or lack of hair line. And you inherit from your parents your height. Now the hairline and the height, you know, those last two, thanks mom and dad. Right? So that's a gift. But in addition to that, there are some other things that surprised me that we actually inherit. Do you know, for example, research has been done, there is a gene inside of us that makes some of us three out of 10 persons, statistically poor drivers. Poor drivers, three out of 10 individuals inherit a gene that makes them poorer drivers and it's just our luck that they all seem to migrate at rush hour on Route 30. We also have scientific evidence that you can inherit fear of going to the dentist. Yeah, there's a gene, they've discovered it. You can pass that gene on from generation to generation. Fear of going to the dentist. You can also inherit genes that determine facial expressions. Right? Facial expressions or how you feel about exercise? Boy, I missed that gene in childhood. Totally explains a lot. And you inherit a gene that makes some individuals prone to procrastinate. I was going to do more research on that, but one day I'll get around to it. And there was a Danish study done that you have a gene potentially that makes you prone to a highly aggressive sweet tooth. I find it quite humorous that it was a Danish study that did that.

And there's scientific evidence that tells us that you can inherit your capacity for empathy, musical ability or even athleticism. So, when you take in all of that, we tend to

inherit a number of things, a number of trades from our parents. We also inherit from our nurturing family, whether they're biological parents or not, we can inherit other things. Other characteristics like, what about the way you laugh? Do you know that, that can be nurtured, you can inherit your capacity or your ability and your style of laughter. Also, we inherit our work ethic from our nurturing parents or our lack of a work ethic for some individuals. And we also inherit from the environment that we grow up in, our capacities for racism or biases culturally or people prejudices. We inherit that from the nurturing environment in which we grow up.

We also inherit the capacity to be generous. Generosity is one of those traits that gets passed on from the nurturing environment in which we grow up, how generous we are today, or how stingy we are today with our resources is much a sign of what has been passed on to us from the nurturing environments in which we have grown up. It's a lot to have inherited from our parents. I remember growing up as a kid and especially when I was a teenager going to places like church and, you know, different arenas where we'd run into relatives and I'd always have a cousin or an aunt or, you know, sometimes an uncle to come up to me, pinch my cheek and go, "Oh, you're just like your father. You're just like your father." Anybody ever say that to you? You're just like your father. You're just like your mother. Anybody say that? Sometimes we believe they mean it as a compliment. Sometimes we take it as a compliment. Sometimes we don't. What do you inherit from your parents?

Well, a couple of weeks ago, as we began the advent season, I started a message series that we're calling "I'll Be Home for Christmas," and in the series, we're focusing in on one character within the Christmas story, the character of Joseph, and we're looking at a large number of questions related to Joseph. We don't have a ton of information about him, but we're extracting from what we do know about Joseph and we're asking larger questions or we're learning larger principles. For example, two weeks ago, we learned that you could measure a person's capacity for love by how much they are willing to sacrifice. And then last week, we added to that that you can trust the one, meaning God, you can trust the one who entrust us with his Son. You can trust God. The one who has entrusted to us His one and only Son.

Well, today I want to take this one step further, and I want to somehow pull out of the Christmas story a little bit of nuance that you know again, we don't know much about Joseph, but I want to pull it out to examine it for our purposes because I think there's something to be learned in this story. And to do that, I want to take you out of the Christmas story and into the adult Jesus in Matthew Chapter 13, starting at verse 54. Now, feel free to follow along on your Bible or the Bible app. Let's listen as God speaks to us a very important word from Joseph's life. This is Matthew 13. Jesus is now an adult, and He's going back to His hometown to begin His preaching ministry. And this is what it says,

***"Coming to his hometown, He began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked." [Matthew 13:54 NIV].***

Notice that question. That question is asking, how did He inherit this? How did He inherit this wisdom and miraculous power? Where did this come from? Goes on verse 55,

***"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name, Mary and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things? And they took offense at him.? [Matthew 13:55-57 NIV].***

So, they're asking, how did Jesus get all of this stuff? How did he get it? How did he get the ability to do miracles? How did he get the ability to articulate so much wisdom? He is starting his preaching ministry in his hometown, and they know his background. This is the equivalent of what happened when I preached for the very first time in my home church, right? I was still just beginning seminary, I preached my very first message in my home church, and I thought it was a profound message, right? This was going to be life changing. And as I stood at the back of the church shaking hands, person after person, after person came up to me and said, "I changed your diapers when you were in the nursery." Wow. Back then, I had one response that I didn't say, "so did you not hear anything that I said?".

The reality is they knew him. They knew this Jesus, and they could not wrap their heads around the message that he was bringing however, amazed that they were by the impactful nature of the wisdom and miraculous signs that they saw. But notice that in these verses, how they identify Jesus is that Jesus is the carpenter's son. That tells us that they identified Joseph as Jesus's earthly father and they're also telling us that Joseph was a carpenter. What we learned last week is that word carpenter in the original Greek is probably a handyman and that they didn't have a ton of trees in the Middle East. So it wasn't that they were used to it to somebody, you know, doing natural carpentry work. Most likely he was engaged in stone masonry or repairs and normal craftsmanship. And Joseph probably passed on that trade to Jesus. We could anticipate that because that was what was done back then.

Isn't this the carpenter's son? It's interesting, and what we learn from these verses is that we tend to inherit the passions of the ones who raise us. We tend to inherit the passions of the ones that raise us. What passions do you inherit? Now we don't know a lot about Joseph. We've already kind of formulated that there's not much about his story in the Gospels. We do know that he's very present at the birth of Jesus. We also know in one of the gospels where Jesus disappears, he's roughly about 12 years old on their trip, a family trip to Jerusalem, and they go searching for him and find him in the temple at 12, teaching the word of God to the religious leaders. We know that Joseph is present. There's a reference to him. Everywhere else in the Gospels, the only accounts that we have are what we just witnessed in like Matthew 13; a peripheral reference that Jesus is the carpenter's son or Joseph's son. What are we to make of that?

So, it made me wonder what could Jesus have actually inherited? Whether in the environment of the community in which he grew up or from being raised by Joseph the carpenter? And so, I'm kind of making a suggestion here that Joseph probably passed on to Jesus, carpentry skills or more specifically, masonry skills or craftsmanship skills, how to fix things, how to be a handyman. He probably passed that on. And by the way, as

I'm sharing some of these traits that perhaps Jesus inherited from Joseph, think about the spiritual implications. Carpentry skills, masonry skills. What else could Jesus have inherited? Perhaps a keen eye to fix what is broken. Think about that. I'm directly a recipient of this inherited skill by Jesus. That Jesus could see in me, a broken person, a broken life, something that's worth being fixed. Perhaps Joseph also passed on an ability to build homes and tear down walls. And as this one makes me think of Jesus when He's in the upper room with His disciples just hours before His arrest in John 14, He says, this is the Jersey paraphrase "Hey, trust me. Trust me, trust God, I'm going to prepare a place because in my Father's house, there's many rooms" or in some translations, many mansions. I'm going to go prepare a place and when it's all prepared, I'm going to come back and take you to be with me.

So, Jesus would have learned how to build homes and tear down walls that separate us from the heart of God. He also potentially learned from Joseph a heart to reuse materials so that nothing is wasted. If you're like me, I look in the mirror sometimes, and I think of all the things that are wrong with me. But what we see is trash, Jesus sees as potential treasure. Maybe from His dad, His earthly dad, He got that heart of stewardship to never waste anything. No matter how painful it is, no matter how broken your life is Jesus never wastes anything in your life story. Could He have learned that from his earthly father?

We certainly do inherit the passions of the ones who raise us. So really, what we have with Joseph is somebody who partnered with God in raising God's son. And all of what Joseph gave to Jesus, emerged out of the character that God saw in Joseph that caused God to want to adopt Joseph to be the stepfather of His Son way before Jesus was even born. And the character of Joseph that he passed on to Jesus actually ended up preparing Jesus for not only His ministry, but also His coming suffering and sacrifice, crucifixion and death. Because you don't face those without having a solid sense of who you are. God used Joseph to prepare that character in Jesus to face the mission that Jesus had been born to live out. And that made me wonder so since Joseph is partnering with God, what might God's passions be?

Adult Jesus is teaching us in John Chapter 3, some of those passions. Very familiar verse of Scripture John 3:16,

***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." [John 3:16 NIV]***

And in verse 17, most of us ignore 17 but 17 is so critically important.

***"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." [John 3:17 NIV]***

So, what is the passion? If we take that and give you a little bit of nuance rather than just, we inherit the passions of the ones who raise us. Maybe the truth of what Joseph teaches us is that we inherit the passions of the one who raises us. The one who will raise us as we put our trust in Him. When we look at it from Jesus's perspective, what

are God's passions? Perhaps in His life, we look at sacrificial love and forgiveness because clearly that is a passion of God. We ultimately see that on the cross on which Jesus hung and died for the sins of the world. For your sins and mine. Sacrificial love and forgiveness are essential values, their passions that God has. It is why he sent Jesus to begin with. God also has a passion of hospitality, invitation to new life, Jesus is constantly in the gospel saying come and see, come, and follow. There's an invitation to new life. Regardless of what you're facing right now, regardless of your past, regardless of the sin that may color your life the God who's passionate about new life is inviting you. He's inviting you to trust him. And Jesus has a keen eye to never waste anything.

God's passionate also about compassion, incarnational compassion specifically for the lost, the hopeless, the poor. Jesus, we see doing that all the time. Reaching out to those who are on the fringe. Making sure that they hear the good news as well. God is also passionate about generosity. Constantly God is giving to us, and God is, according to the Scriptures, an abundant God. An abundant God, who gives everything, including his one and only Son. That generosity is seen clearly in how Jesus gave himself away. And also, God's passionate about the community, the new community of faith called the church. That new community, that's you and me. Jesus died in order to inaugurate this movement called the church. So, the church is part of the passion of the Lord. We're important to him. God changes the world through the church, through you and me. Through us. God's passion. And those last two, the generosity and the commitment to the church, Jesus is constantly reminding the disciples and all of us who are reading these words today, that God's generosity extends to the entire kingdom. As adopted children in Christ, we inherit nothing short of the Kingdom of God.

In Luke 12, Jesus says,

***"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." [Luke 12:32 KJV].***

To give you the kingdom. So, everything that Jesus inherits from His father in heaven, we inherit as co-heirs. Powerful. Jesus teaches a parable, and he says in Matthew 25,

***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance. The kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" [Matthew 25 31-34 NIV]***

Notice that word inheritance. The inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world, this was always God's intention. And then in verse 35, Jesus says,

***"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you look after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." [Matthew 25 35-36 NIV].***

Notice that the kingdom's gift, the inheritance is because the people are embodying that which they inherited in traits, in character, the passions of God himself. Jesus then drops the bomb, Verse 40,

***"The King will reply, 'Truly, I tell you whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did, for me.'" [Matthew 25:40 NIV].***

You did for me. We inherit the passions of the one who raises us, the one who will raise us. So, I got to ask, as a child of God, how am I reflecting the passions of my Heavenly Father? This is a question I'm asking myself throughout Advent. How am I reflecting the passions of my Heavenly Father, the one who promises to raise me, the one to whom I have given my life, my heart, my all? How am I reflecting the one who will raise me? Why is this important? One day when I come to those proverbial pearly gates and stand before the Lord, I want Jesus to pinch my cheeks and say, "You're just like your Father. You're just like you're Father." Capital F. So what do we do with this? You know that list of what God's passions are sacrificial love and forgiveness, hospitality, incarnational compassion, especially for how we treat the lost, the hopeless, the poor generosity and how we live, not defined by what we own or what owns us, but by the one who gives abundantly. The new community, the church, our sisters and brothers, how we doggedly protect one another's reputations. I challenge each of us to pick one of those traits that we are to reflect on the passions of God, our Father and to prayerfully ask, 'Lord, allow this inheritance to be reflected in me. Allow the DNA of your spirit in me to show people that I belong to you, that I belong to the Father in Heaven. We inherit the passions of the one who will raise us.

Will you pray with me?

*God, I thank You, for how You give Yourself so fully to us, how You gave Yourself unreservedly in Jesus Christ on the Cross and how You poured into a tiny little baby the powerful truth of a God who loves us so much. That nothing, nothing, nothing could separate us from Your grace. So, Lord, equip us, equip us with that same passion and allow us each and every day to reflect Your heart in Jesus Christ. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.*